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Israel

Country Profile

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Israel

by Geary Cox and Daniele Ressler [Mine Action Information Center]

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Again at the heart of Mideast conflict, Israel has received international attention not just because of persistent landmine and unexploded ordnance contamination in the region, but also because of military operations in southern Lebanon. Recent attention has underscored the need to address the threat posed by landmines and other explosive remnants of war; perhaps one important way to address this would be the signing of international agreements prohibiting the use of indiscriminate weapons.

Mine Impact and Abatement

Mines in Israel date back to the World War II era (and some of these mines remain active).[1] Since then, Israel has subsequently emplaced mines along borders, near military bases and other important infrastructural installations; the country's long-held position is that landmines are essential for national security and defense.[1] More than 33 square kilometers (13 square miles) of land are mined or suspected of being contaminated in Israel, the West Bank and the Golan Heights.[2]

Statistics regarding mines/UXO and their impact in Israel are inconsistent, and the total number of landmine casualties in Israel is not known.1 Israel has reported citizen casualties from mines, booby traps and other explosive devices emplaced by terrorists operating in the country, while the *Landmine Monitor Report* only provides records on unspecific anti-personnel mine use in the country.[1] Since 2004, the LMR has received no reports of use of anti-personnel mines inside Israel, and only "a few" reports of use in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.[1] Media reporting may be responsible for the discrepancy between Israeli reports and other surveys because media information often does not specify if reported injuries are the result of victim-activated explosives or from other sources, such as improvised explosive devices.

The Israel Defense Forces' Engineering Corps handles demining, as there is no national coordinating agency. Contractors provide clearance support on an emergency basis and in other circumstances when available. The Israeli Mapping Center maintains all information on minefields, which are all fenced, according to Israeli officials. As part of a prisoner exchange in January 2004, Israel provided information on minefields affecting southern Lebanon to the militant Shiite group Hezbollah, which is based in southern Lebanon.[1]

According to the *Landmine Monitor Report*, the last confirmed landmine incident occurred in 2000 when an Israeli soldier was injured while clearing landmines along the Israeli-Lebanese border.[1] Since then, however, the effects of mine and UXO contamination in the region have been exacerbated by the recent 34-day conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Hezbollah fired an unverified number of rockets into Israeli

territory, including, according to Human Rights Watch, rockets filled with hundreds of metal ball bearings, highly imprecise Katyushas[3] and Chinese-made Type-81 122-mm rockets, a type of cluster munition.[4] At the time of writing, no official reports have been released regarding Israeli clearance of ERW within Israel, but the IDF has reported that they are training United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon peacekeepers in Lebanon on safe clearance for cluster bombs and mines.[5]

Treaties and Stockpiles

Israel is not a State Party to the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention,[6] although Israeli officials have repeatedly supported publicly the ultimate goal of the Convention. Citing continuing security concerns, Israel has declined to accede to the Convention and has abstained from voting on every pro-mine ban resolution in the United Nations General Assembly since 1996. It is, however, a State Party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons[7] and its Amended Protocol II on landmines.[1]

Production of anti-personnel landmines ended in the early 1980s and the dismantlement of production lines was disclosed in 2004. Israel approved a continuous prohibition on the exportation of AP mines in 1994 and recently reauthorized it in July 2005.[1]

The country's stockpile of landmines contains both hand-emplaced and remotely delivered mines. The last known use of AP mines by the Israel Defense Forces occurred during their withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000.[1] However, an unconfirmed U.N. report on November 25 claimed that Israel emplaced new landmines in Lebanon during the recent conflict, after four deminers looking for cluster submunitions were injured in what turned out to be a minefield in Deir Mimas, and where an additional new and intact Israeli No. 4 anti-personnel mine was identified.[8]

According to the United Nations, during the 2006 conflict with Hezbollah, Israel fired at least 1.2 million submunitions via thousands of cluster bombs using the Multiple Launch Rocket System and artillery projectiles.[8] Cluster munitions, while presently legal under international humanitarian law, are controversial. Some cluster submunitions have high failure rates, leading to unexploded bomblets that present a threat to civilians. The United Nations believes the failure rate of Israel's cluster munitions may be as high as 40 percent.[9]

News reports of unconfirmed Israeli use of depleted-uranium bombs (DUBs) against targets in Lebanon have appeared since the conflict ended. The Independent in the United Kingdom published reports of higher-than-normal levels of radiation at two blast sites hit during the summer conflict.[10] The United Nations Environment Programme is investigating the allegations and was expected to issue a statement on findings in December 2006. Israel is known to maintain DUBs but issued a strong denial of allegations it used the weapons. Samples were taken from the sites outside the towns of Khiam and At Tiri in southern Lebanon.[11]

Educating the Public and Treating Victims

Israel does not offer specialized mine-risk education in schools, although programs on terrorism alert the public to the danger from explosives. The last landmine-related death occurred in 2000 when a soldier was injured while clearing landmines. While the total number of casualties in Israel is not known, the majority occurred during the wars of 1967, 1973 and 1982.[1]

Rehabilitation services for injured citizens can be found in Israel's main hospitals and are offered to people from other Mediterranean countries. The country itself has six workshops for prosthetics, 10 for orthotics, over a dozen orthopedic shoemakers and many physiotherapists. However, the *Landmine Monitor Report* notes a shortage of rehabilitation specialists.[1]

All landmine victims receive full coverage of treatment costs from the *Hamosad Lebituah Leumi*, and citizens who cannot continue in their previous occupations receive vocational training and other

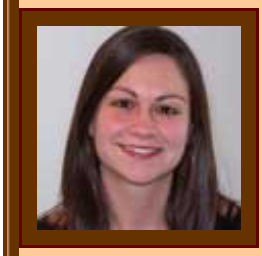
assistance.[1]

Conclusion

While the landmine situation in Israel is tenable, there is room for optimism with Israel's adherence to international agreements against indiscriminate weapons; however, this will only occur when a stable security situation prevails. Recent conflict in the area has resulted in further contamination by explosive remnants of war.[12] Clearance efforts in the entire region had to be suspended because of the conflict, and the effects of contamination are only beginning to be realized as displaced citizens in Israel and Lebanon return to their communities. Also troubling are reports that bombs used by Israel may have contaminated the region with unknown amounts of radiation.[10] For a more thorough review of the effects of the recent conflict, see The Aftermath of War.

Biography

Geary Cox is an Editorial Assistant for the *Journal of Mine Action* and a graduate student at James Madison University. Having received a bachelor's degree in English and political science from JMU in 2005, he is pursuing his Master of Arts in English with a concentration in creative writing.



Daniele Ressler works as a Researcher, Writer and Assistant Editor for the *Journal of Mine Action*. She holds a Master of Science in violence, conflict and development studies from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. She has studied in Switzerland as well, earning a Certificate for Applied Studies in peacemaking. Daniele has previously worked in Washington, D.C., and Seattle, Washington, in the field of conflict management, and has also lived in Nairobi, Kenya.

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Contact Information

Geary Cox
Editorial Assistant
Journal of Mine Action
E-mail: maic@jmu.edu

Daniele Ressler
Researcher / Assistant Editor
Journal of Mine Action
E-mail: maic@jmu.edu